

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 102

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PFOR EI

SUBJ: IRISH GOVERNMENT'S ASSESSMENT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN
NORTHERN IRELAND

1. SUMMARY: FOREIGN MINISTRY NORTHERN IRELAND EXPERT TOLD EMBOFF
THAT GOI IS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT CHANCES FOR POLITICAL SUCCESS IN
RECALLING THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONVENTION BUT AGREES WITH HMG
ACTIONS BECAUSE THERE WAS NO OTHER CHOICE. DUBLIN GOVERNMENT FEARS
THAT COLLAPSE OF THE TALKS WILL MEAN THAT LOCAL POLITICAL LIFE
WILL BE AT AN END, BUT THEY ARE SOMEWHAT HEARTENED THAT BRITISH
DETERMINATION TO STICK IT OUT IN NI COMES THROUGH CLEARER THAN IT
HAS IN THE PAST YEAR. ON THE SECURITY FRONT HE WAS GUARDEDLY
OPTIMISTIC. CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN LONDON AND DUBLIN ON SECURITY
COOPERATION ARE NOW CLOSE AND GENERALLY SATISFACTORY. THE DUBLIN
GOVERNMENT'S PUBLIC SILENCE ON THE WESTMINSTER DEBATE AND SUBSE-
QUENT RECALL OF THE CONVENTION IS A CALCULATED EFFORT TO AVOID
COMPLICATING WHAT IS ALREADY "A VERY DICEY POLITICAL SITUATION."
END SUMMARY

2. POLITICAL ASSESSMENT BY GOI: DCM CALLED ON GOI FOREIGN MINISTRY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY SEAN DONLAN JAN. 15 ON ANOTHER SUBJECT AND
ASKED HIM FOR A READ-OUT ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRE-
LAND, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE GOI HAS BEEN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY SILENT
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(DUBLIN 85) FOLLOWING NORTHERN SECRETARY REES' AND PM WILSON'S

STATEMENTS TO PARLIAMENT AND THE TRANSFER TO SOUTH ARMAGH OF THE CRACK SPECIAL AIR SERVICES (SAS) MILITARY UNIT. DONLAN, WHO IS FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD'S SENIOR EXPERT IN N.I. MATTERS, BEGAN BY SAYING THAT HMG HAD CONSULTED WITH THE GOI BEFOREHAND, THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER HELD LITTLE HOPE OF ANYTHING POSITIVE COMING FROM A RECALLED CONVENTION, AND THAT THE FEAR WAS THAT AFTER A MONTH OR TWO THERE WOULD BE AN END TO POLITICAL LIFE IN THE NORTH RESULTING IN INSTITUTIONALIZED DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER. DUBLIN, HE SAID, HAD CONCURRED IN HMG ACTIONS BECAUSE IT SIMPLY WAS THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

3. ONE RESULT OF GOI'S ASSESSMENT OF WHAT IS ALREADY A VERY DICEY SITUATION IN THE NORTH IS THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN, AND WILL NOT BE AT THIS TIME, ANY OFFICIAL COMMENT FROM THE REPUBLIC ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION OR ON THE RECONVENED NI CONVENTION. (COMMENT: THE EMBASSY BELIEVES, BUT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM, THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS GOTTEN THE OPPOSITION FIANNA FAIL PARTY TO JOIN IN THIS SILENCE.) DONLAN SAID HE BELIEVES THAT AT THIS STAGE THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING THAT THE GOI COULD SAY PUBLICLY THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO THE RENEWED NEGOTIATIONS. HOWEVER, IN AN EFFORT TO BE QUIETLY HELPFUL, THE GOI HAS PUT OUT THE PRIVATE WORD TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE NORTH THAT IF DEMANDS FOR "AN INSTITUTIONALIZED IRISH DIMENSION" WERE TO BECOME A STUMBLING BLOCK IN NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO PARTICIPATION OF BOTH SIDES IN GOVERNMENT, THEY WOULD BE QUIETLY DROPPED BY THE DUBLIN GOVERNMENT. DONLAN WENT FURTHER: HE SAID THAT IF OBJECTIONABLE PARTS OF THE REPUBLIC'S CONSTITUTION (PRESUMABLY ARTICLES TWO AND THREE) BECAME A SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLE TO WHAT USED TO BE CALLED POWER-SHARING WITH THE CATHOLIC MINORITY, THE GOI WOULD SERIOUSLY UNDERTAKE TO STUDY THE POSSIBILITIES OF AMENDMENT.

4. SECURITY ASSESSMENT: DONLAN EMPHASIZED THAT, IN THE CURRENT FRAGILE POLITICAL SITUATION, EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN STABILITY THROUGH PHYSICAL SECURITY (AND COOPERATION WITH HMG ON SECURITY) HAVE BECOME MORE IMPORTANT TO THE GOI. TIGHTER SECURITY INSIDE THE REPUBLIC AND MORE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION WERE NECESSARY FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY GROUPS HAVE SENT AUTHORITY WORD TO THE GOI THAT, IF WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS THE HARBORING OF IRA RAIDERS IN SAFEHAVEN IN THE REPUBLIC IS NOT STOPPED, RETALIATORY BOMBINGS INTO THE SOUTH WILL BE CARRIED OUT. THE

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DUBLIN AIRPORT BOMBING WAS A FORETASTE. SECOND, THE GOI FEELS IT NEEDS TO ERASE ITS IMAGE IN THE UK AND AMONG SOME IN NI THAT IT IS LACKADAISICAL ABOUT SECURITY AND EMPHASIZE THAT THE REPUBLIC HAS A GOVERNMENT THAT IS SERIOUSLY TRYING TO CONTAIN IRA TERRORISM. WHEN ASKED ABOUT HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE RECENT ASSIGNMENT OF SAS TROOPS TO ARMAGH, DONLAN SAID THAT THE DUBLIN GOVERNMENT ESSENTIALLY DID A "COP-OUT." THEY MIGHT HAVE PREFERRED A MILITARY RE-INFORCEMENT LESS INFAMOUS THAN "THIS DIRTY TRICKS UNIT,"

BUT IN THE END INFORMED THE BRITISH ONLY THAT HMG KNEW BEST WHAT WAS NEEDED. THE IRISH TOLD THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT THAT THEY PERCEIVED THE PUBLIC ATTITUDE IN THE BORDER AREA AND IN THE NORTH TOWARD THE PRESENCE OF BRITISH TROOPS HAD IMPROVED PERCEPTIVELY. THEY CAUTIONED HMG THAT ONE MIS-STEP BY THE BRITISH ARMY, SAY, BY AN ACCIDENTAL SHOOTING OF AN INNOCENT CIVILIAN OR ERRONEOUS HOT PURSUIT BORDER CROSSING INCIDENT, COULD REVERSE QUICKLY THE PRESENT TIDE OF INCREASING REVULSION FOR THE IRA AND THE INCREASING QUIET SUPPORT BY THE POPULACE OF THE BRITISH ARMY PRESENCE. CURLEY

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